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Basic psychological needs and depression in adolescence: What's gender got to do with it?

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Despite the established relationship between basic psychological needs and depression as an indicator of mental health in adolescents, the role of gender as a potential moderator in these relationships remains under-explored. The aim of the present study was to investigate the relationship between basic psychological need satisfaction and frustration and depression, as well as the moderating role of gender in these relationships within a large adolescent sample. A sample of 2,031 Serbian adolescents (61% females, Mage = 15.67) completed measures of basic psychological need satisfaction and frustration, depression, and sociodemographics. Analyses included a moderation analysis in which the satisfaction and frustration of the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness were independent variables, gender was the moderator variable, and depression was the dependent variable. The direct relationships between the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs for competence and relatedness and depression were negative and significant. The effects of frustration of all basic psychological needs on depression were positive and stronger compared to needs satisfaction. Gender was found to moderate four out of six tested models, with the relationships being stronger in girls than in boys. Obtained results indicate that gender significantly moderates the relationship between both the satisfaction and frustration of almost all basic psychological needs and depression in adolescents. The effects are generally stronger for girls than for boys, highlighting the importance of considering gender differences when addressing psychological needs to mitigate depression in adolescence.

Keywords: basic psychological needs, Self-Determination Theory, depression, gender, adolescence.

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Primary authors: ŠAKAN, Dušana (Department of Business Psychology, Faculty of Law and Business Studies dr Lazar Vrkatić, University Union Belgrade); Prof. GAVRILOV-JERKOVIĆ, Vesna (Department of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad, Novi Sad, Serbia); Prof. ZOTOVIĆ-KOSTIĆ, Marija (Department of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad, Novi Sad, Serbia); Prof. TOMAŠEVIĆ, Aleksandar (Department of Sociology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad, Novi Sad, Serbia); Prof. JOVANOVIĆ, Veljko (Department of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad, Novi Sad, Serbia); Dr LAZIĆ, Milica (Department of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad, Novi Sad, Serbia); Ms OBRADOVIĆ, Vojana (Department of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad, Novi Sad, Serbia)

Presenter: ŠAKAN, Dušana (Department of Business Psychology, Faculty of Law and Business Studies dr Lazar Vrkatić, University Union Belgrade)

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